

## **So you are going to be a Father / Parent!**

This is an exciting time for both you and your partner. Over the next few months there will be amazing changes in your lives as your family develops. There will be many ups and downs, lots of problems to solve and decisions to be made. You are embarking on a whole new career as a parent, a lifestyle change with enormous benefits and great joy and also heavy responsibilities and concerns. Your whole perspective will change and in the future you will be seeing the world not just through your own eyes, but also those of your children.

It's a wonderful new experience, full of opportunities to develop your strengths and personal skills. You have probably faced major changes to your life before and the strategies that you used then to weather upheavals will be just as useful now. It is impossible to predict how parenthood will affect you and there is no way of knowing in advance what your baby will be like, what your child will need and how you and your partner will manage the new challenges you will inevitably encounter.

Remember that you already have valuable experience, from being a child yourself, being raised by your own parents and from many important events in your life as you have grown up. These form a solid foundation from which you can develop your own parenting style as a father/partner. They will also be a resource for you when you are trying to decide how to solve the problems you will encounter with our own children.

You have a very positive and valuable contribution to make to this pregnancy, the birth to come and later with your baby and child. These ideas will help you get started and show you how you can be involved. This pregnancy and birth will never occur again, so make the most of it and enjoy it as much as you can!

### **Keeping Pregnancy and Birth in Perspective**

Being pregnant is a natural state for women. Their bodies are cleverly and uniquely designed for childbearing and "having a baby" is not an illness condition that requires medical treatment. Just as your partner is capable of having and enjoying sex, she is capable of creating a baby, giving birth and breastfeeding with the same degree of pleasure and fulfillment. Even though her body is uniquely equipped to produce a baby all by itself, she needs your support and companionship as she discovers her latent talents for motherhood.

Your partner will be undergoing huge changes within her body, many of them seemingly mysterious and some of them challenging. The physiological processes involved in producing a baby are much the same for every woman, yet each woman will respond to these creative urges in her own way. In general, trust her to know what she needs: only she can tell what she is feeling, and the intense personal closeness of her developing baby often enable her to have remarkable insight into the baby's needs as well.

### **Your Role**

The primary role for men over the thousands of years women have been having babies (apart from playing a major role in getting whole process started!) has been to support and protect the woman during her pregnancy, while the birth is in progress and in the critical weeks after the birth. To grow a healthy baby a woman needs good food, a calm, safe environment, and freedom from worry or anxiety. These are areas where a nurturing partner is especially useful, and by taking on this role, you will be rewarded with a healthy baby and a happy partner, confident in her ability to nurture and raise your child. Much like an insurance policy, plenty of loving support throughout the pregnancy and during birth should result in a better outcome and significantly reduced chance of problems later on.

The complexity of the health care system and the many choices on offer need careful consideration. Your partner will need a listening ear and an ally as she explores the kind of care available from the various health professionals and as she chooses an appropriate place to give birth. Working together to make the necessary decisions will make these tasks easier and more rewarding.

You bring a unique perspective to these decisions: you are closely involved, yet because you are not the one actually giving birth you may find it easier to see the bigger picture. It can also be a difficult position, since your emotional involvement can tend to cloud your view, and there will be times when you need to put your partner's views before your own.

## **Your Needs**

Becoming a parent can be an emotional and physically draining time. During the pregnancy, many partners report similar ups and downs to their pregnant partners, sometimes felt as see-sawing emotions and at other times as physical symptoms.

Every partner has been down this road before you, and all have fascinating stories to tell of their experiences. It can be enormously helpful to talk to other partners about their reactions, and you'll discover that these feelings are remarkable common. If you are concerned, seek appropriate help, so that you can relax into your new lifestyle with confidence.

There is nothing to stop you accompanying your partner on her pre-natal visits to her caregiver. Going together gives you an opportunity to discuss your own needs, and to have your questions answered. A competent caregiver should be very willing to make time for you too and recognize your rights as well.

Above all, take the time to participate and enjoy these new experiences. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to seek help from those around you. You'll be surprised at how willing people are to offer suggestions!